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TIME SPENT ON HOUSEWORK AS A DETERMINANT OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN THE MEMBER STATES

Abstract

Taking demographic forecasts of ageing society into account, economic activity becomes more and more important. They show that in the nearest future burden of working population by pensioners will increase significantly. Unfortunately, all the Member States face this problem, that's why the European Union pays attention to the necessity of increasing economic activity, mainly because of economic reasons. Women are less active than men in the Member States, therefore in this respect women belong to the group of a particular interest.

In this case, indicating factors that determine such a low level of economic activity is of key importance. Various aspects are mentioned, mainly those involving housework done by women and men having its roots in tradition, socio-cultural standards, stereotypes as well as education, place of living and family status.

The aim of this article is to compare women's and men's economic activity in the EU and describe major determining factors which mainly focus on time spent on housework by men and women. The parameters having impact on the share of housework will be described as well.

Key words: men's and women's economic activity, determinants of economic activity, time spent on housework by men and women.

Introduction - the theoretical rudiments of women's economic activity

Economic activity of population has impact on position and competitiveness of the domestic labour market. It also has impact on development of human resources, particularly individuals working on the local and regional labour market. There are numerous definitions of economic activity and inactivity. In this article, we'll use the one introduced in BAEL: number of unemployed and working. The working people include those who are employed as hired workers, work on own (or leased) farm, run their own business or help on a farm or run business but they don't receive any payment. The unemployed (group) include those who simultaneously comply to the following requirements: they don't work in the examined period and are available for work within 2 weeks or don't look for a job because they have already found one and are waiting for taking it.

The group of economically inactive includes people who don't look for a job because they are pensioners, sick, disable, students, are obtaining their qualifications, they aren't available for work because of rising children and keeping a house or they are discouraged

because looking for a job turned out to be unsuccessful or they simply don't want to work.

The level of economic activity depends not only on socio-economic factors but also on such psychological determinants as: education, place of living and family status, gender etc. (Kryńska, 2000). The latter one is a very significant factor because women are perceived by society as those who have to conform to stereotypes of mother, that's why, in comparison with men, their economic activity is lower. The model assumes that a woman has to combine a career and a family life, particularly society expects her to be a mother and take care of children (The World Bank Report, 2004). Such cultural stereotype is reflected in discrimination women on the European labour market, comparing to men, the rates vary significantly as they devote more time to housework.

Time spent on housework and work

Generally, society believes that men work longer than women. Most people understand work only as a job they are paid for, moreover, people who don't work professionally claim that they don't work. Whereas work includes also a job we do at home but we aren't paid for.

Gainful employment is done outside a house and brings income. **Non-paid work**, however, is regarded as a job that can be done by a third party (babysitting, washing, cleaning and cooking) that's why housework is a non-paid work.

Housework is defined as a job done free of charge to keep own or somebody's else house clean and tidy to meet the needs of family members. It has its equivalent on the market.

The difference between work and **activities done in spare time** is that work can be done by a third party while spare time activities are done on our own (watching TV, reading or playing football) (Mikuta, 2000).

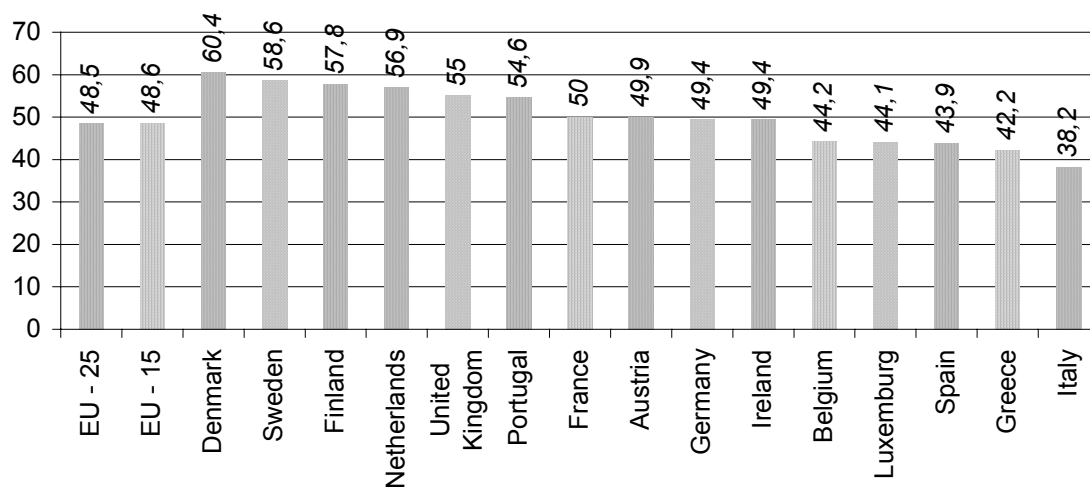
First researches on time spent on housework were conducted in the 1960s. The results became a source of reference in a political debate on gender inequality in the labour market (Plantenga, 2000).

Different women's and men's share in housework has its roots in tradition, socio-cultural standards, stereotypes, it has impact not only on the rate of economic activity but also on opportunities in professional career including promotion and holding a managerial position.

Women's and men's economic activity in the Member States

Average level of women's economic activity in the EU-25 amounts to 48,5%, the highest rate was registered in 2004 in Denmark (60,4%), Sweden (58,6%), Finland (57,8%) and the Netherlands (56,9%).

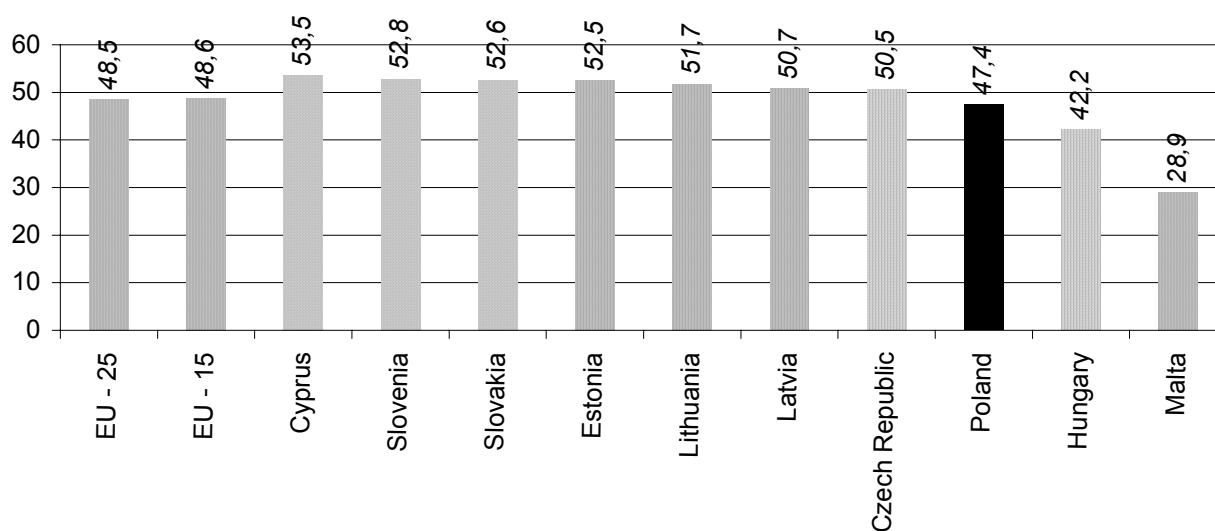
Chart 1. Women's economic activity rates in 2004 in the EU-15



Source: own compilation based on Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>.

Whereas the lowest one was registered in Southern Europe: Italy (38,2%), Greece (42,2%) and Spain (43,9%). The lowest women's economic activity among the new Member States was in Malta (28,9%).

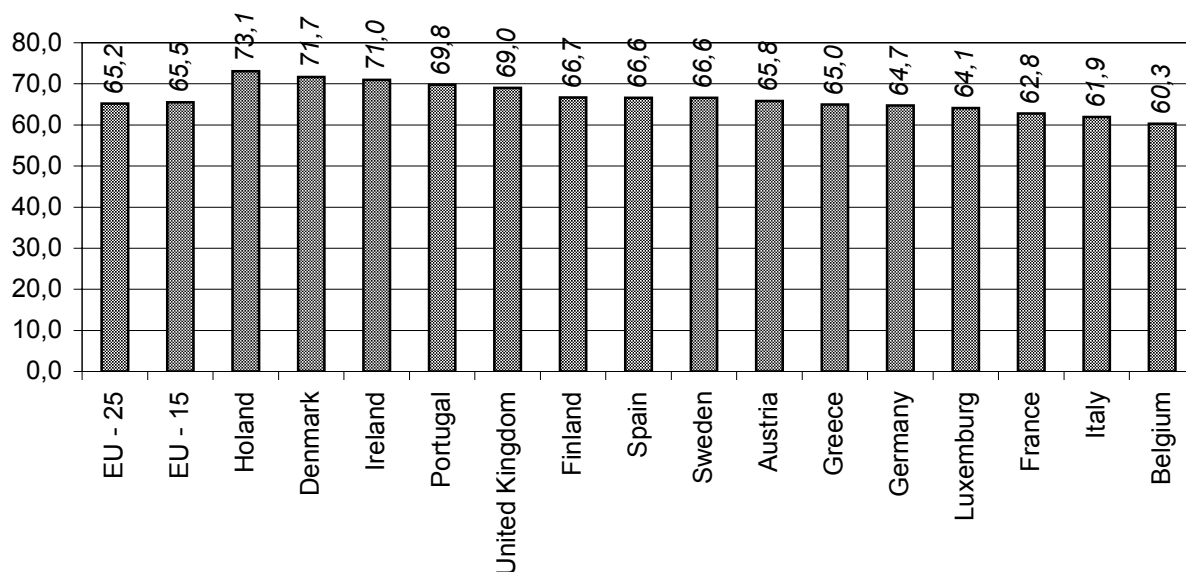
Chart 2. Women's economic activity rates in 2004 in the new Member States



Source: own compilation based on Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>.

Comparison of above data with men's economic activity proves that they are more economically active than women. On average in the EU, about 65,2% of men aged 15 and above are economically active. The highest rate was registered in 2004 in the EU-15: the Netherlands (73,1%), Denmark (71,7%) and Ireland (71%), while the lowest one was registered in Belgium (60,3%), Italy (61,9%) and France (62,8%).

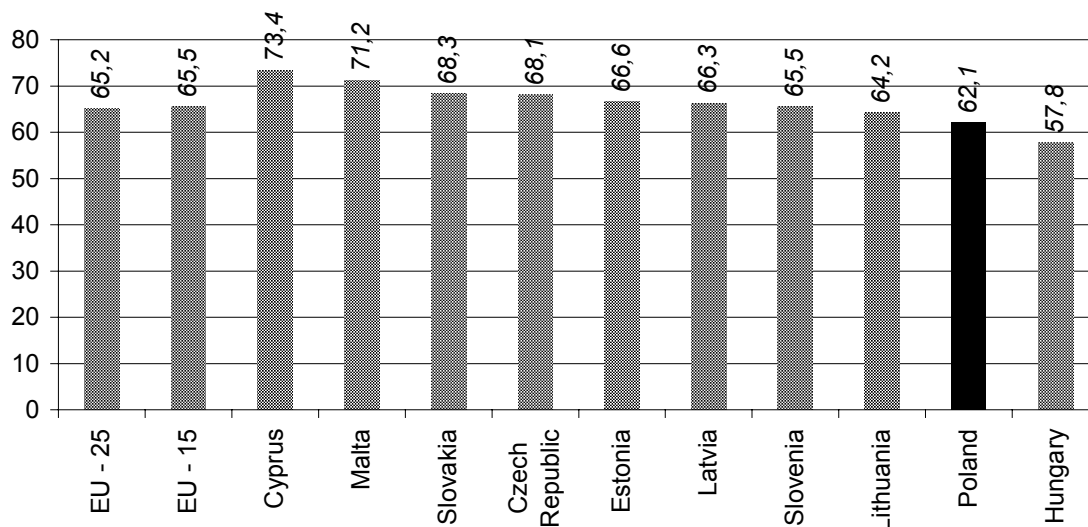
Chart 3. Men's economic activity rates in 2004 in the EU-15



Source: own compilation based on Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>.

As for men, the highest rate for men in the new Member States was in Cyprus (73,4%) and Malta (71,2%).

Chart 4. Men's economic activity rates in 2004 in the new Member States



Source: own compilation based on Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>.

It is worth mentioning that Cyprus is the state where men's economic activity is the highest in the entire EU, whereas the lowest rate among the new Member States was registered in Hungary (57,8%) and Poland (62,1%).

The economic activity rate for Poland (for women and men) is below the average. Among all Member States, Polish women were ranked as 18th and men as 22nd. Additionally, between 1999 and 2004 economic activity of Poles decreased by 2,3 % for women and by 2,2 % for men.

Analysing changes in men's and women's economic activity between 1999 and 2004,

it should be noticed that women's economic activity decreased only in five Member States, namely (except for Poland), in Lithuania (by 3,4%), Czech Republic (by 1,5%), Malta (by 0,8%) and Finland (by 0,3%), whereas it was increasing in the other Member States. The highest increase was reported in Cyprus (by 4,4%), the Netherlands (by 3,9%), Ireland (by 3,5 %) and Luxembourg (by 3,4%). Men's and women's economic activity rates in the EU between 1999 and 2004 are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Men's and women's economic activity rates in the EU between 1999 and 2004

Countries	2004	1999	Countries	2004	1999
Men			Women		
Cyprus	73,4	72,5	Denmark	60,4	60
Netherlands	73,1	72,2	Sweden	58,6	56,4
Denmark	71,7	71,8	Finland	57,8	58,1
Malta	71,2	70,4	Netherlands	56,9	53
Ireland	71,0	60,4	United Kingdom	55	53,8
Portugal	69,8	69,8	Portugal	54,6	52,2
United Kingdom	69,0	70,8	Cyprus	53,5	49,1
Slovakia	68,3	67,8	Slovenia	52,8	51,5
Czech Republic	68,1	70,1	Slovakia	52,6	51,7
Finland	66,7	68,2	Estonia	52,5	51,6
Spain	66,6	64,9	Liithuania	51,7	55,1
Sweden	66,6	65,5	Latvia	50,7	49,9
Estonia	66,6	67,2	Czech Republic	50,5	52
Latvia	66,3	67,4	France	50	48,9
Austria	65,8	69,4	Austria	49,9	49,5
EU – 15	65,5	66,3	Germany	49,4	49
Slovenia	65,5	64,8	Ireland	49,4	45,9
EU – 25	65,2	65,9	EU - 15	48,6	46,7
Greece	65,0	65,0	EU - 25	48,5	47,5
Germany	64,7	67,4	Poland	47,4	49,7
Lithuania	64,2	68,4	Belgium	44,2	43,2
Luxemburg	64,1	64,3	Luxemburg	44,1	40,7
France	62,8	63,2	Spain	43,9	39
Poland	62,1	64,3	Greece	42,2	40,4
Italy	61,9	61,8	Hungary	42,2	41,5
Belgium	60,3	61,2	Italy	38,2	35,4
Hungary	57,8	58,2	Malta	28,9	29,7

Notes: in the EU–25, due to the lack of data taken in 1999, in case of Cyprus and Malta the one from 2000 was used.

Source: own compilation based on Eurostat, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>.

Men's economic activity decreased in Lithuania (4,2%), Austria (3,6%) and Germany (2,7%) while it increased in Spain (1,7 %), Cyprus and the Netherlands where still they are the highest (by 0,9 %).

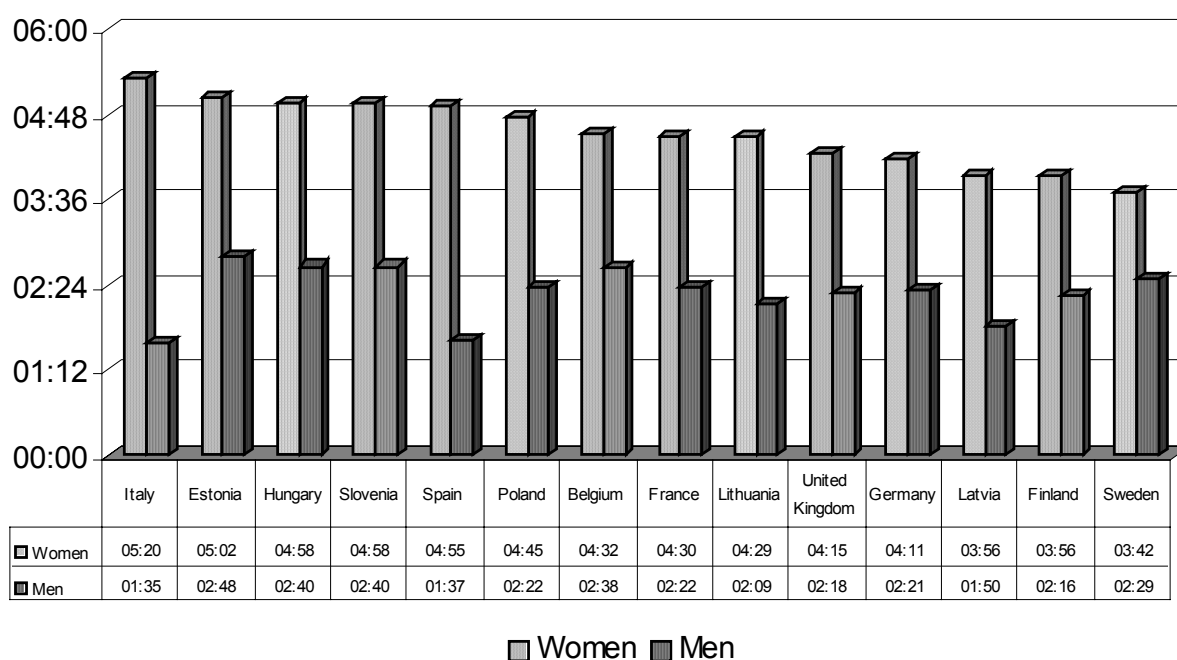
The above analysis proves that women are less economically active than men, it's mainly due to already mentioned stereotype of women's role in family, equated with time

spent on gainful employment and housework.

Time spent by men and women on housework in the EU

First researches on time spent on housework were conducted in the 1960s. The results became a source of reference in a political debate on gender inequality in the labour market (Plantenga, 2000). The most recent research was conducted in selected Member States by Eurostat and results were published in March 2006. It was undertaken between 1998 and 2004 and covered population aged 20 to 74 living in: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Statistic in Focus, 2006). The average daily time spent on housework by men and women is shown in chart 5.

Chart 5. Average daily time spent on housework by men and women



Source: own compilation based on Statistics in focus - Population and Social Conditions no 4/2006, Eurostat 28.11.2005.

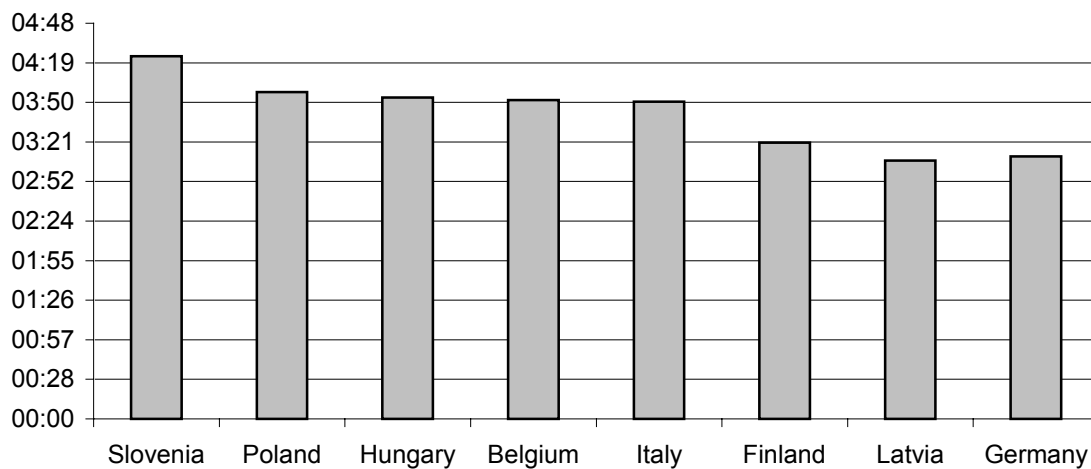
The most time is spent on housework by women from Italy (05:20h), Estonia (05:02h), Hungary and Slovenia (04:58h) and Spain (04:55h), the least by women from Sweden (03:42h), Finland and Latvia (03:56). As to men, Estonians (02:48h), Hungarians and Slovenians (02:40h) spent the most time on housework while Italians (01:35h) and Spaniards (01:37h).

The most significant difference in time spent on housework between men and women was registered in Italy (03:45h) and Spain (03:18h). In the new Member States the difference was about 02:20h, in Poland 02:23h, Lithuania - 02:20h, Hungary and Slovenia - 02:18h while the slightest difference was in Sweden (01:13h), Finland (01:40h), Germany (01:50h) and Belgium (01:54). Men spent less time on housework than women, even the longest time spent by men on housework (in Estonia 02:48h) was shorter than the time spent by Swedish women which was the shortest one (03:42h).

Similar tendencies were observed in time spent by working women and men. Most time was spent on housework by working women from Slovenia (04:24h), Poland (03:58h), Hungary (03:54h), Belgium (03:52h) and Italy (03:51h), the least by working women from

Finland (03:21h), Latvia (03:08) and Germany (03:11h).

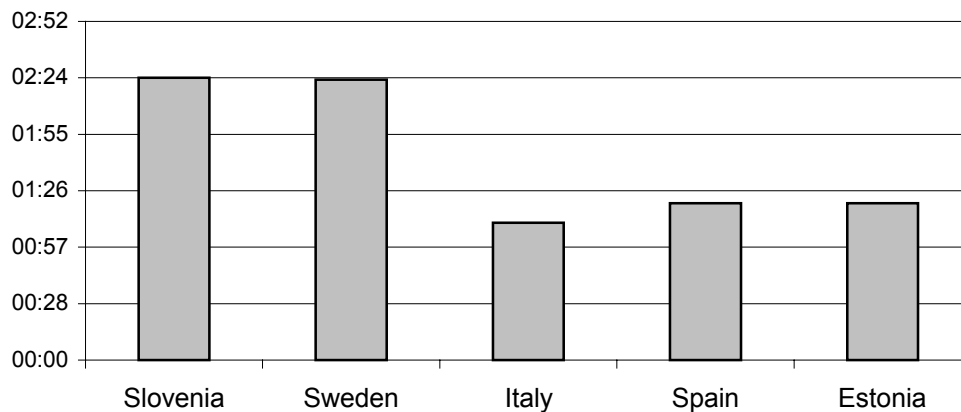
Chart 6. Daily average time spent on housework by working women in the EU



Source: own compilation based on Statistics in focus - Population and Social Conditions no 4/2006, Eurostat 28.11.2005.

As to working men, the most time was spent on housework by Slovenians (02:24) and Swedes (02:23), the shortest one by Italians (01:10), Spaniards and Estonians (01:20).

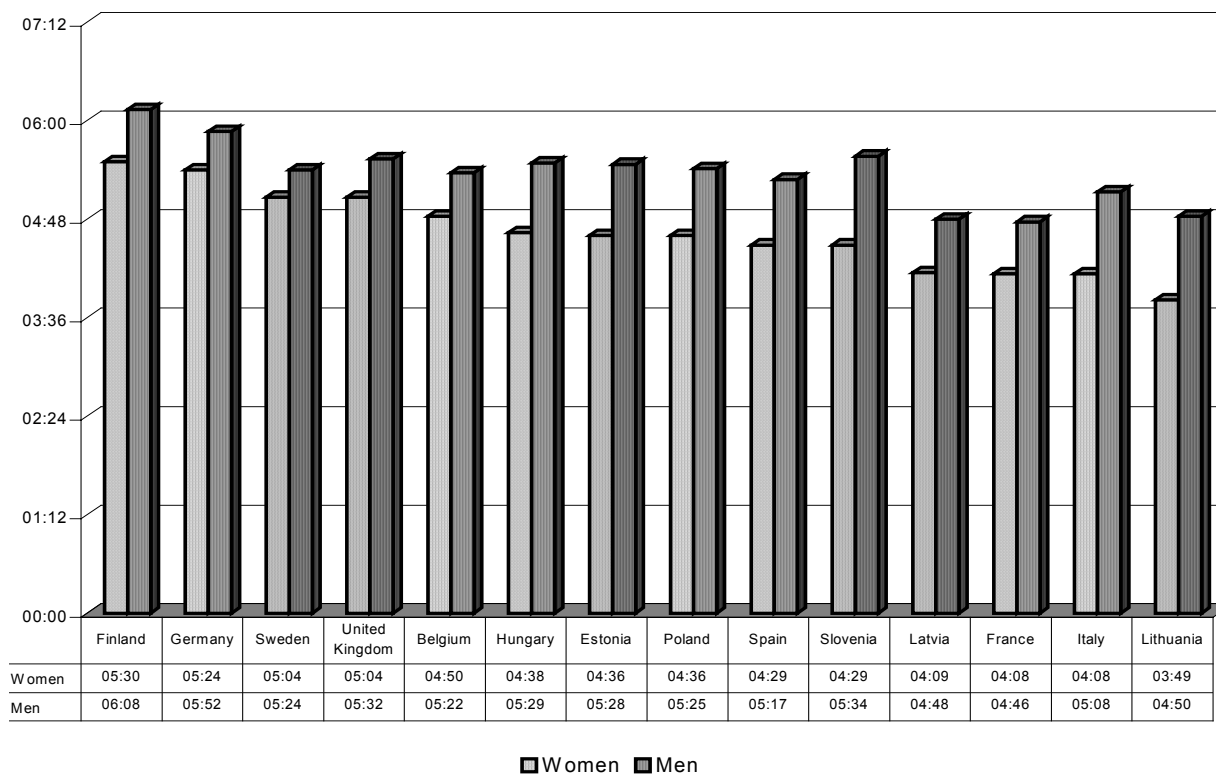
Chart 7. Daily average time spent on housework by working men in the EU



Source: own compilation based on Statistics in focus - Population and Social Conditions no 4/2006, Eurostat 28.11.2005.

Data shown above proves that women devote more time to housework than men, that's why women are more tired, less flexible at work and less committed to it, these factors have impact on diminishing role of women on the labour market. Moreover, mentioned factors influence not only work but also spare time (including: helping other households, socializing and entertainment, sports and outdoor activities, hobbies and games, reading, watching TV, resting and doing nothing), what is shown in chart 8.

Chart 8. Average spare time by men and women



Source: own compilation based on Statistics in focus - Population and Social Conditions no 4/2006, Eurostat 28.11.2005.

Women's spare time was shorter in all Member States where the research was conducted. The most spare time enjoyed women from Finland (05:30), Germany (05:24), Sweden and Great Britain (05:04), while the least those from Lithuania (03:49), Italy and France (04:08) and Latvia (04:09).

As to men, the most spare time enjoyed men from Finland (06:08), Germany (05:52), Slovenia (05:34) and Great Britain (05:32) while the least those from France (04:46) and Latvia (04:48).

The most significant difference between both genders, to women's disadvantage, was registered in Slovenia (01:05), Lithuania (01:01) Italy (01:00) while the slightest one in Sweden (00:20), Great Britain (00:28) and Germany (00:28).

Factors influencing the share of housework

Data mentioned above shows that women, including working ones, devote much more time to housework than men, that's why they have less spare time. Hence it's necessary to focus on the factors having impact on sharing housework by women and men.

Data shown in this article proves that the highest women's economic activity is, the highest share of men in housework is. Also researches conducted by other authors showed that there is a relation between women's economic activity and sharing housework with men. Moreover, the researches showed that the highest level of education of spouses is, the highest men's share in housework is. Men with vocational and primary education regard housework as a female domain which is unsuited to them. It's due to common gender stereotype and feeling that both genders loose their identity. What's more, also place of living determinates the share of men in housework. In rural households women are responsible for all the chores

while in urban ones men share housework with women to a greater extent. Moreover, the more family members are in the household, the higher share of men in housework is. It increases significantly in 3-5 person households. Furthermore, the higher income is, the lower women's share in housework and higher men's share are. Also share in periodic cleaning is increasing. It's also worth mentioning that in households with higher income and women economically active, the majority of chores is done by hired workers or companies (Mikuta, 2000).

This share as well as women's activity on the labour market also depends on socio-cultural conditions, standards, rules and gender stereotypes about women's and men's role in society. Also socialization of boys and girls as well as instilled division for male and female activities are of great importance because it maintains discrimination of women on the labour market.

Conclusion

The data on women's position on the labour market in selected Member States shows clearly that devotion to housework which is reflected in diminished involvement in gainful employment depends to a greater extent on the gender. Women devote more time to non-profit work particularly in families with small children what determines their worse position, comparing with men, on the labour market. Different women's and men's share in housework has its roots in tradition, socio-cultural standards, stereotypes, it has impact not only on the rate of economic activity but also on opportunities in professional career including promotion and holding a managerial position. Therefore, we could raise a question: is it possible in the future to equal share on housework taking into account increasing number of professionally working women and awareness of equal share of chores? The example of countries of the former Eastern block proves that increase in women's economic activity isn't enough to increase the share in chores. The sharpest difference in time spent on housework between men and women, to women's disadvantage, is in Southern Europe and countries undergoing transformation (it's due to culture). Therefore these countries need implementing appropriate policy on partnership in family that will ease combining family life and carrier, particularly flexible working hours, supporting women's entrepreneurship, creating programmes of professional reintegration after maternity leaves and effective use of the EU funds in order to increase employment. Such actions have already been taken in the Scandinavian countries and the results are already seen: higher men's share in housework and lower discrimination of women on the labour market.

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